

## **Boston's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program Policy Principles for Fiscal Year 2023**

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### **MISSION**

The mission of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development is to promote the full participation of all Boston residents in the city's economic vitality and future. Our purpose is to be an advocate, clearinghouse, and laboratory for "best practices" in literacy, beginning at birth; lifelong learning; job training/placement; and support services so Bostonians may fulfill their educational and employment aspirations.

### **OVERVIEW**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a U.S. Department of Labor program to serve youth who face education, training, and employment barriers. Information and resources on WIOA can be found on the Department of Labor's website:

[www.doleta.gov/WIOA](http://www.doleta.gov/WIOA).

In June 2021, Boston's MassHire Workforce Development Board concluded a strategic review of its WIOA Youth policy. The review was launched in preparation for the FY23 open and competitive RFP. The remainder of this document outlines the vision, goals, and policies for Boston's WIOA Youth programs which draw extensively from the strategic plan.

### **VISION AND GOALS**

The vision for Boston's WIOA Youth program is to establish an integrated and coordinated system of services that stabilizes the marginalized youth and transitions them towards career-oriented education, training, and employment. The WIOA Youth funding cycle was lengthened to three years to build program stability and accommodate a longer time frame for program delivery.

The principles and competencies described in the next sections build on the five key goals identified in the WIOA Youth strategic plan:

1. WIOA Youth are on a pathway to or through post-secondary education and training
2. WIOA Youth programs provide evidence-based services to OSY populations ages 18-24
3. WIOA Youth have access to timely, high-quality, and specialized 14 program elements, particularly stabilization services
4. The system has meaningful and high-quality data to improve WIOA services and outcomes and advance local priorities
5. WIOA Youth system has linkages to broader economic networks

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### STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

We request programs that are designed to place out-of-school youth ages 18-24 years on a pathway towards post-secondary attainment or career-level employment. To accomplish the program goal, the following principles will guide the selection of programs:

#### ***1. Programs are framed around a multi-step intervention model***

We seek multi-step program interventions, with each phase culminating in the achievement of a substantive education, training, or developmental milestone in its entirety. Figure 1 illustrates the ideal configuration of the multi-step intervention, although the program activities associated with each step can be structured in a sequential, concurrent, or non-sequential manner, as dictated by the program design. Program models that intervene at the earliest stage of the education and training pathway and move youth through at least two complete steps are prioritized in this RFP. Each step must have a clear strategy and direction, along with well-defined metrics and transition points into the subsequent program or post-program step. Intensive case management and access to specialized support services must be ongoing services provided throughout the program. Programs that do not progress youth through a minimum of two steps will not be considered for funding. A set of example activities supports the objectives that correspond to each step in Figure 1.

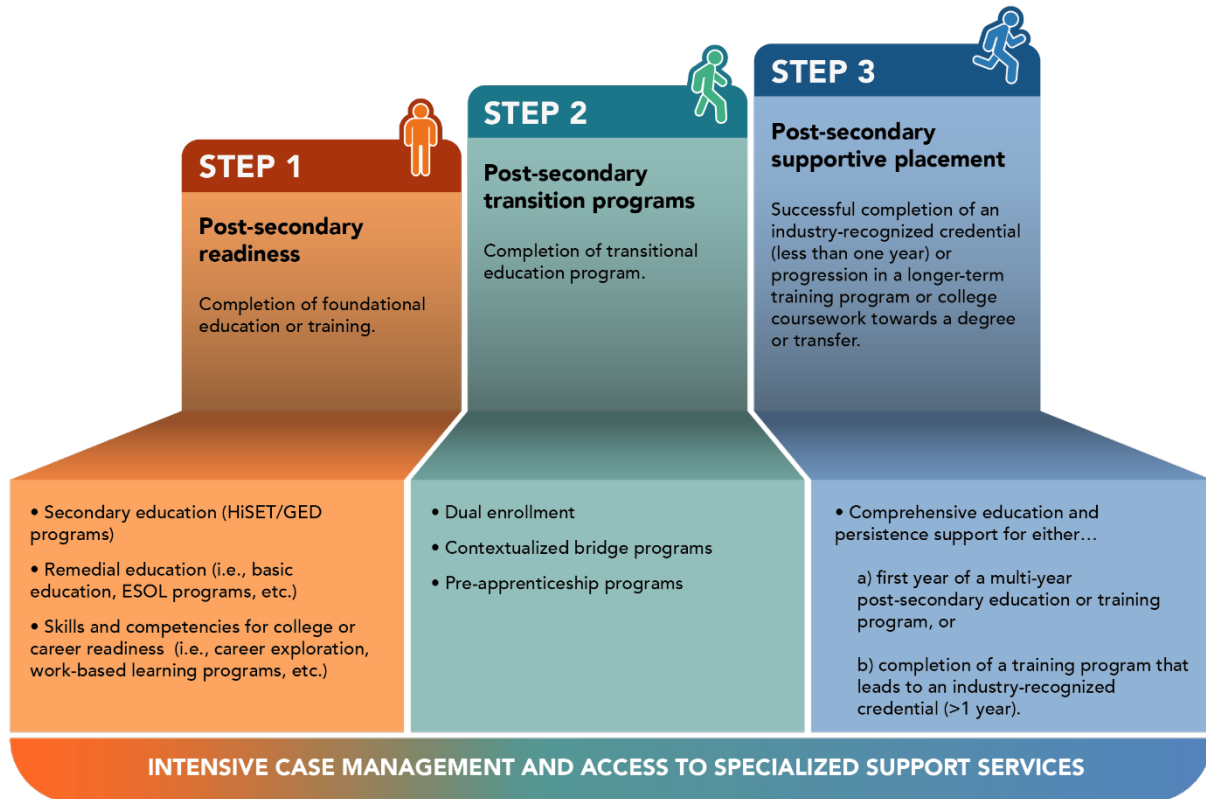
Embedded models are acceptable, and partnerships are encouraged to deliver core services. Examples of multi-step program designs include:

- A post-secondary program that embeds a GED/HiSet program
- A contextualized GED/HiSET program that is integrated with a college/university bridge program
- A work-based education or learning program that transitions youth to a registered apprenticeship
- A remedial education and work readiness program that pipelines into an employer-funded, paid training program

Additionally, effective program designs have multiple entry and exit points to ensure accessibility for youth with various needs. Program services should be flexible and highly individualized to address the specific needs and circumstances of each WIOA Youth, which are unique, wide-ranging, and vary over time.

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**Figure 1.** Multi-step pathway (min. two levels for WIOA funding)



- 2. Programs have well-defined and robust transition processes to the post-program step:**  
 Programs must coordinate with relevant partners to deliver an integrated set of activities designed to promote the participant's successful transition from the WIOA Youth program into the next stage of their career path. For example, program models that move youth through Step 2 should have well-defined steps and processes to ensure youth progress to an industry-recognized training program or college enrollment. Likewise, programs that carry WIOA Youth to or through an industry-recognized training program (Step 3) must demonstrate actions to facilitate appropriate and timely transition into training-related employment or specify a comprehensive set of activities

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that ensure youth's continued retention and success in training or education programs that lasts longer than one year. In addition, programs should demonstrate how these processes reflect best practices in transitioning and retaining the chosen population in post-secondary education or career employment.

3. ***Program policies and protocols are evidence-based and appropriate for the population:*** Interventions should be based on the most current knowledge of meaningful and effective programming for out-of-school youth. Programs that incorporate the following evidence-based approaches will be prioritized:
  - a. The intentional use of technology and interactive media to support learning and program activities
  - b. Culturally competent and trauma-informed programming and case management
  - c. Financial incentives, including stipends, incentives, wages, and other conditional cash transfers for a range of purposes - from programs that allow participants to 'earn' while they 'learn' to small incentive payments that reward achievement of program milestones. Innovative earn and learn programs that target traditionally underserved youth populations are strongly encouraged
  
4. ***Programs put youth on a pathway to the attainment of post-secondary credentials needed for employment in high-demand occupations:*** Program models that transition youth from an early pathway step into an education or training program that leads to a high-value credential are prioritized. This includes AA/BA level degree programs, apprenticeships, and occupational training programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials necessary to enter middle-skill careers with strong earning potential. Stackable credentials, which permit on-ramps and off-ramps when credential attainment matches the youth's ability and/or career aspirations, are strongly encouraged.
  
5. ***Programs leverage multiple internal and external partnerships to ensure the integration of high-quality, youth-focused services:*** Collaborative and coordinative partnerships are central to the success of WIOA Youth programs, as demonstrated by the [statutorily required 14 program elements](#). Programs are expected to demonstrate partnerships with youth-serving systems, including education institutions, juvenile justice systems, housing providers, MassHire career centers, and community-based

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organizations. Programs that do not directly provide the fourteen elements listed must demonstrate the ability to collaborate with other organizations to ensure participants can access the full continuum of services. In addition, we seek programs with strong connections to ancillary service providers, especially mental health, housing, disability services, and social service providers. Furthermore, as part of monitoring and evaluation, programs will be asked to identify and document strategies to co-enroll youth in complementary programs offered by Boston Youth Services Network (BYSN) providers.

### TARGET POPULATIONS

Boston's WIOA Youth program aims to serve out-of-school youth ages 18-24 years old, with a focus on these specific underserved youth populations:

- Low-income youth who are basic-skills- deficient; English Language Learners; Boston Housing Authority (BHA) residents and residents utilizing a housing voucher; residents of a high-poverty area; court-involved; homeless including those experiencing housing instability or residence inconsistency outside of the federal McKinney-Vento definition; runaway; in foster care, or aged out of the foster care system; pregnant or parenting; youth with a disability; young men of color; documented immigrant youth.

The term 'out-of-school' youth includes individuals who are— (i) not attending any school and (ii) one or more of the following: (I) A school dropout. (II) A youth within the age of compulsory school attendance but has not attended school for at least the most recent complete school year calendar quarter.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Organizations will be required to meet both standards and enhanced WIOA performance measures. OWD has negotiated the standard WIOA Youth measures with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. Programs should read the [WIOA performance and accountability guidance](#) published August 23, 2017, in TEGL 10-16 Change 1 for details on required performance measures. Enhanced performance measures are outcomes that align with Boston's local strategic objectives, such as the percent of youth placed in post-secondary education/training at the exit, percent achieving post-secondary credentials, percent placed in middle-skill level career jobs at exit, etc.

### PROPOSED BIDDER COMPETENCIES

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When procuring services under WIOA youth, the following competencies and program features will be prioritized. Programs may provide the services themselves or leverage the services of a partner agency:

- Experience managing a federal grant with rigorous compliance requirements in terms of eligibility, database management, and performance outcomes tracking.
- Program applicants should have multiple funding sources
- Connection to programs that serve the target population, particularly those that provide stabilization and other specialized support supports
- Ability to partner with other organizations to provide a full set of education, youth development, work experiences for youth participants comprehensive specialized services
- Ability to provide culturally and linguistically competent programs and services
- Offering work experience both during and after the program